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ABSTRACT

This study examined advice-seeking by beginning teachers. Researchers surveyed 128 beginning teachers and their mentors who were participants in the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's Beginning Teacher Assistance Program, a university-based program that offers support to small- and medium-sized local school districts. Beginning teachers were asked to predict how often they would turn to their mentors for advice or help in 18 areas. Mentors were asked to predict how often their proteges would seek advice or help in the same 18 areas. Data analysis indicated that beginning teachers and their mentors generally overestimated how often they would come together to seek or give advice or help regarding the 18 areas represented in the survey. Help with policies and procedures and general support and encouragement remained prominent areas over the course of a year's program. The focus of mentoring tended to default to the areas of information about policy and procedures and support and encouragement. (SM)

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Areas of Advice Seeking Among Beginning Teachers in a Mentoring Program

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Interest in mentoring programs for beginning teachers, including experienced teachers new to district, has never been higher (Fideler & Hazelkorn, 1999; National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999; Scherer, 1999). Formal induction programs have grown very rapidly during the past twenty-five years (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). This is likely to continue due to several trends that result in an increase in the number of beginning teachers entering the field, including increasing enrollment in schools, a wave of teacher retirements, and state and federal programs and policies that aim to reduce class size.

There is considerable variation in the structure of mentoring programs but the most common feature is promoting a professional relationship with a veteran teacher serving as a mentor and a new teacher. There is also considerable variability in the extent to which mentors and their protégés are provided with guidance in developing a working knowledge of their roles and responsibilities as mentors and protégés. At the safe time, it is safe to assume that in almost every case, new teachers will seek advice from their mentor on a wide variety of issues, ranging from school policies and procedures to suggestions for professional development activities. It is also reasonable to suppose that new teachers and mentors both have ideas about what the advice-seeking topics are likely to be.

This study is based on surveys of 128 participants in the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater ***Beginning Teacher Assistance Program,*** a university-based program that has been offered as a service to small to medium sized school districts in the area. It has existed since 1974 and is one of the longest continuously operating program of its type in the United States. More specifically, this study is based on surveys completed by

program participants between 1992-93 and 1998-99 in September and in April. Additional information about the respondents is displayed in Table One.

On the September survey, beginning teachers were asked to predict how often they would turn to their mentor for advice or help in 18 different areas, and the mentors were asked to predict how often their protégés would seek their advice or help in the same 18 areas. Respondents were asked to indicate their prediction using a likert-type scale:

1 = Seldom or never

2 = Occasionally

3 = Neutral or no opinion

4 = Quite frequently

5 = Very often, on a regular basis.

On the April survey, respondents were presented with the same 18 items. Beginning teachers were asked to indicate how often they turned to their mentor for advice or help in the 18 areas, and mentors were asked to indicate how often their protégé came to them for advice or help in the 18 areas. Results of the September survey are displayed in Table Two and results of the April survey are displayed in Table Three. Tables Two and Three presents the mean ratings, the rank order for the 18 areas from high (=1) to low (=18), and the rank order correlation. Table Four displays the differences between the ratings (April rating minus September rating) for the 18 areas.

As indicated in Table Two, the mean rating on the September survey for all 18 areas is higher for the beginning teachers (3.86) than it is for the mentors (3.64). This suggests that the beginning teachers predicted they would seek advice from their mentors

to a greater extent than their mentors predicted their advice would be sought. However, the difference is not statistically significant. The two areas with the greatest means for both beginning teachers and mentors were (6) Finding out about policies and procedures (ranked one) and (13) General support and encouragement (ranked two). The area with the lowest mean was (16) Involvement in extracurricular activities (ranked eighteen). Two areas revealed statistically significant differences between the beginning teachers means and those of the mentors, (4) Motivating students ($p < .05$) and (14) Evaluation procedure for contract renewal ($p < .01$). In both cases, the beginning teachers predicted they would seek help in those areas more often than the mentors did. The correlation between the rankings for the areas is moderately positive, at 0.79.

Table Three reveals that the mean rating for the April survey for all 18 items is higher for the mentors (3.26) than it is for the beginning teachers (3.16). In other words, the mentors slightly overestimated how often the beginning teachers came to them for advice in comparison to the estimate of the beginning teachers. Although there is no statistical difference between the means, the grand mean for the 18 areas is considerably less when compared to the September survey, dropping from 3.86 to 3.16 for the mentors, and from 3.64 to 3.26 for the beginning teachers. The two areas with the greatest means are (6) Finding out about policies and procedures and (13) General support and encouragement, as was the pattern in the September survey. The two areas with the lowest means are (17) Involvement in extracurricular activities and (18) Specific instructional techniques and methods. There were no significant differences in the means for any of the area and the correlation between the rankings for the areas was positive at 0.87.

Table Four reveals that for the beginning teachers, there was a drop in the means for all 18 areas, ranging from –1.07 for (14) Motivating students to –0.28 for (1) Communicating with colleagues, when April ratings are compared to September ratings, suggesting that beginning teachers overrated in September how often they would come to their mentor for advice. For the mentors, the same pattern of a drop in means, ranging from –0.70 for (17) Other aspects of the job to –0.13 for (15) Personal concerns and matters was true for all areas except area (7) Planning, organizing, and managing time and work, where there was a slight increase for the mentors' rating. For areas (4), (5), (7), (14), and (16) the difference between the mentors' ratings and the beginning teachers' rating was significantly different at the $p < .05$ level and for areas (10) and (11) it was significantly different at the $p < .01$ level. The correlation between the rank order of the 18 areas (with rank one representing the greatest drop in means) was moderately positive at 0.65.

The results of this study suggest that beginning teachers and mentors generally overestimated how often they would come together to seek or give advice or help regarding the 18 areas represented in the survey. At the same time, help with policies and procedures, and general support and encouragement appear to remain prominent areas over the course of a year's program. Knowing that the resources available in the schools in support of day-to-day mentoring activities tend to be scant, it is not surprising that the focus of mentoring, as revealed in this study, tends to "default" to the areas of information about policy and procedures, and support and encouragement, which come very naturally to mentors and their protégés. In addition, the sometimes significant

differences between mentors' and beginning teachers' teaching assignment make an emphasis on teaching and instructional matters less likely.

Table One Respondent characteristics

	BEGINNING TEACHERS		MENTORS	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender				
Female	41	64.1	45	70.3
Male	23	35.9	19	29.7
Age Range				
24 or fewer years	32	50.8	0	0
25 to 34 years	26	41.3	16	26.7
35 to 44years	5	7.9	16	26.7
45 to 54 years	0	0	25	41.7
55 or more years	0	0	3	5.0
Grade Level				
Elementary	20	31.3	19	29.7
Middle School	19	29.7	21	32.8
High School	22	34.4	21	32.8
Two levels	3	4.7	3	4.7
Type				
Regular Education	58	92.1	59	93.7
Special Education	5	7.9	4	6.3
Teaching Experience				
0 years	48	75.0	0	0
up to 5 years	14	21.9	6	10.2
6 to 14 years	1	1.6	23	39.0
15 to 24 years	1	1.6	22	37.3
25 or more years	0	0	8	13.3

Table Two September survey

		BEGINNING TEACHERS				MENTORS				
	Variable	N	Mean	SD	Rank	N	Mean	SD	Rank	
1.	Communicating with colleagues	63	3.79	0.95	11	54	3.69	0.99	8	
2.	Assessing students and evaluating student work	52	3.62	0.89	14	53	3.34	1.00	13.5	
3.	Dealing with individual student differences	63	3.92	0.97	8	53	3.92	0.85	3.5	
4.	Motivating students	63	3.95	0.99	6	53	3.58	0.93	11	*
5.	Finding out what is expected of beginning teacher	62	4.24	0.86	3	52	3.92	0.88	3.5	
6.	Finding out about policies and procedures	62	4.50	0.67	1	53	4.45	0.75	1	
7.	Planning, organizing, and managing time and work	62	3.42	1.08	15	53	3.25	1.04	16	
8.	Managing the classroom and discipline strategies	62	3.92	0.98	8	53	3.74	0.84	6	
9.	Obtaining instructional resources and materials	62	3.77	1.12	12	53	3.91	1.11	5	
10.	Communicating with parents, parent teacher conf	62	3.92	0.91	8	53	3.72	0.89	7	
11.	Short-term and long-term planning	62	3.39	1.05	16	53	3.21	0.99	17	
12.	Specific instructional techniques and methods	61	3.38	1.05	17	53	3.34	0.96	13.5	
13.	General support and encouragement	62	4.42	0.78	2	53	4.40	0.74	2	
14.	Evaluation procedure for contract renewal, etc.	62	4.13	1.08	4	53	3.60	0.91	10	**
15.	Personal concerns and matters	62	3.66	1.13	13	53	3.38	1.16	12	
16.	Involvement in extracurricular activities, etc.	62	3.29	1.09	18	52	2.96	1.25	18	
17.	Other aspects of the job (role of union, etc.)	62	4.00	1.01	5	53	3.68	0.87	9	
18.	Continuing professional development	62	3.85	1.07	10	53	3.32	1.07	15	
	Grand mean for September survey	63	3.86	0.60		54	3.64	0.56		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Rank Order Correlation = 0.79

Table Three April Survey

		BEGINNING TEACHERS				MENTORS			
	Variable	N	Mean	SD	Rank	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1.	Communicating with colleagues	58	3.57	1.16	4	58	3.45	0.98	6
2.	Assessing students and evaluating student work	59	2.98	1.21	12	58	3.00	1.21	13
3.	Dealing with individual student differences	59	3.46	1.12	5	58	3.62	1.15	4
4.	Motivating students	59	2.85	1.03	15	58	3.10	1.13	12
5.	Finding out what is expected of beginning teacher	59	3.59	1.22	3	57	3.68	1.02	3
6.	Finding out about policies and procedures	59	4.03	1.11	1.5	58	4.07	1.01	2
7.	Planning, organizing, and managing time and work	59	2.86	1.25	14	58	3.21	1.18	9
8.	Managing the classroom and discipline strategies	58	3.14	1.28	9	58	3.47	1.23	5
9.	Obtaining instructional resources and materials	59	3.15	1.34	8	58	3.33	1.29	8
10.	Communicating with parents, parent teacher conf	59	3.10	1.17	10.5	58	3.36	1.00	7
11.	Short-term and long-term planning	59	2.59	1.19	16	58	2.97	1.26	15
12.	Specific instructional techniques and methods	59	2.36	1.11	18	58	2.69	1.25	17
13.	General support and encouragement	58	4.03	1.18	1.5	58	4.17	1.05	1
14.	Evaluation procedure for contract renewal, etc.	58	3.17	1.29	7	58	3.14	1.07	10.5
15.	Personal concerns and matters	58	3.40	1.28	6	57	3.14	1.32	10.5
16.	Involvement in extracurricular activities, etc.	58	2.45	1.27	17	57	2.61	1.29	18
17.	Other aspects of the job (role of union, etc.)	58	3.10	1.29	10.5	57	2.98	1.17	14
18.	Continuing professional development	58	2.90	1.29	13	58	2.78	1.20	16
	Grand mean for April survey	59	3.16	0.76		58	3.26	0.77	

Rank Order Correlation = 0.87

Table Four Differences (April rating minus September rating)

		BEGINNING TEACHERS				MENTORS				
	Variable	N	Mean	SD	Rank	N	Mean	SD	Rank	
1.	Communicating with colleagues	57	-.0.28	1.25	18	48	-0.17	1.06	13.5	
2.	Assessing students and evaluating student work	50	-0.60	1.32	12	47	-0.21	1.32	11	
3.	Dealing with individual student differences	58	-0.50	1.19	14	47	-0.30	1.18	9	
4.	Motivating students	58	-1.07	1.27	1.5	47	-0.51	1.30	4	*
5.	Finding out what is expected of beginning teacher	57	-0.72	1.40	10	46	-0.17	1.18	13.5	*
6.	Finding out about policies and procedures	57	-0.49	1.31	15	47	-0.32	1.09	8	
7.	Planning, organizing, and managing time and work	57	-0.56	1.46	13	47	0.06	1.37	18	*
8.	Managing the classroom and discipline strategies	56	-0.73	1.36	9	47	-0.26	1.21	10	
9.	Obtaining instructional resources and materials	57	-0.68	1.12	11	47	-0.62	1.29	3	
10.	Communicating with parents, parent teacher conf	57	-0.88	1.28	6	47	-0.19	1.23	12	**
11.	Short-term and long-term planning	57	-0.86	1.46	7.5	47	-0.13	1.30	16	**
12.	Specific instructional techniques and methods	56	-1.07	1.32	1.5	47	-0.64	1.44	2	
13.	General support and encouragement	56	-0.39	1.15	16	47	-0.13	0.88	16	
14.	Evaluation procedure for contract renewal, etc.	56	-1.05	1.34	3	47	-0.43	1.12	6	*
15.	Personal concerns and matters	56	-0.34	1.31	17	46	-0.13	1.28	16	
16.	Involvement in extracurricular activities, etc.	56	-0.86	1.27	7.5	47	-0.36	1.21	7	*
17.	Other aspects of the job (role of union, etc.)	56	-0.96	1.39	5	47	-0.70	1.28	1	
18.	Continuing professional development	56	-1.04	1.56	4	47	-0.47	1.53	5	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Rank Order Correlation = 0.65

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